United Nations A/C.5/54/SR.34

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
14 February 2000

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 34th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 10 November 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Ms. Wensley ..... (Australia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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00-29257 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda Item 121: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (*continued*) A/53/955; A/54/6/Rev. 1, A/54/7 and A/54/16; A/C.5/54/1, A/C.5/54/21 and A/C.5/54/25)

First reading (continued)

Section 27. Management and central services

Section 27A. Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management

Section 27B. Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts

Section 27C. Office of Human Resources Management

Section 27D. Office of Central Support Services

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1. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the Advisory Committee's report on part VIII, comprising sections 27 to 27G, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (A/54/7 (chap. II, part VIII)). Section 27, along with its subsections, accounted for the largest share of the regular budget resources requested, some $460.1 million, or about 17 per cent. That estimate represented a net resource reduction of $4.2 million. Extrabudgetary resources projected for common support services amounted to almost $83 million. A total of 2,106 posts, including 584 posts to be funded from extrabudgetary resources, were proposed.

2. With respect to section 27A, he said that the Advisory Committee considered that there was a need to examine the workload of all bodies dealing with the administration of justice to determine whether additional support was warranted. The Advisory Committee had questioned the staff resources proposed under all sections of the proposed programme budget, including section 27B, for the maintenance of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS). Specifically, it saw no rationale for financing those positions from general temporary assistance rather than proposing temporary or even established posts, and had requested that the matter should be reviewed in the context of the next budget proposals.

3. Turning to section 27C, he said that the Organization's personnel practices and policies required urgent attention by the Secretariat and Member States, and had been a major subject of concern to the Advisory Committee. Its views on the issue were contained in chapter II, paragraphs VIII.32 and VIII.33, and chapter I, paragraphs 98 to 105, of its report. He drew attention to the note by the Secretary-General on personnel practices and policies (A/C.5/54/21), which had been submitted pursuant to a request by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 104 of its report.

4. Paragraphs VIII.24 to VIII.29 and VIII.80 of the Advisory Committee's report dealt with training, for which almost $20 million had been requested. An evaluation of all United Nations training programmes undertaken pursuant to the request made by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VIII.59 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/52/7/Rev.1) had shown that those programmes were of high quality, well designed and cost-effective. The Advisory Committee requested that the shortcomings identified in the evaluation should be addressed, in particular those relating to the decentralization of training programmes to individual departments and offices, and that there should be greater transparency in the presentation of training programmes and related costs in the next budget proposals.

5. With respect to section 27D, he said that the use of information technology in support services would provide invaluable benefits to the Secretariat and Member States. However, the United Nations was far behind the funds and programmes in establishing a coordinated, integrated strategy on information technology reform. Indeed, there appeared to be no overall vision and no leadership. The recent appointment of a new Director of the Information Technology Services Division was a step forward, but the Advisory Committee had been warned that, because of the absence for years of real policies in that area, time and effort would be required to fully develop an effective Organization-wide strategy. The Advisory

Committee concluded, in paragraph 92 of its report, that a strategy should be developed as a matter of urgency and that change should mean not only the purchase of hardware and software, but also a concerted and sustained effort to inculcate the culture of information technology throughout the Secretariat.

6. Another major subject of concern was common services. In response to its enquiry regarding the progress of the common services project resulting from the proposals of the Secretary-General on reform (A/51/950), the Advisory Committee had been informed that there had been several meetings by a number of working groups. The Advisory Committee cautioned in paragraph VIII.57 of its report that too many working groups holding too many meetings and discussing a large variety of subjects might be a recipe for protracted discussions and ultimate failure. Priority should be given to services that were good candidates for common delivery using the criteria of efficiency, productivity, and cost-effectiveness. Where it had been determined that those requirements had been fulfilled but there was reluctance to proceed, Member States should be informed in order to provide legislative guidance.

7. Vienna was more experienced than either New York or Geneva in the delivery of joint or common services, including the capacity to develop workload performance indicators for determining billing rates for those services. In paragraph VIII.94, the Advisory Committee expanded on its views on determining services that should be considered for joint or common delivery.

8. Regarding section 27F, he drew attention to the Advisory Committee's observations in paragraphs VIII.98 and VIII.99 of its report on building management in general and on the Vienna International Centre complex in particular.

9. With regard to section 27G, he noted that, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/220, the Secretary-General had made a commitment to increase gradually the regular budget component of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), with a view to easing the administrative costs levied on the substantive programmes of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). There was a need to refine the methodology used to estimate the workload connected with the performance of services by UNON on behalf of UNEP and Habitat and the related cost. The efficiency of the charge-back arrangement needed careful monitoring, and the Advisory Committee had therefore requested the Board of Auditors to pay particular attention to that issue in its next audit of the regular budget for the current biennium. It recommended the approval of four additional posts proposed by the Secretary-General for the Division of Administrative Services, Nairobi.

10. **Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination) introduced the conclusions and recommendations of CPC on sections 27 to 27G of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 contained in paragraphs 437 to 441 of its report (A/54/16). In paragraph 439 of its report the Committee had recommended to the General Assembly that it should request the Secretary-General to reformulate the narrative of section 27C in accordance with its resolution 53/221. The revised narrative was contained in document A/C.5/54/17. The Committee had emphasized, in paragraph 437, that the responsibilities and workload of the secretariat of CPC, which also served as the secretariat of the Fifth Committee, should have been clearly spelled out in the programme narrative, and it recommended, in paragraph 438, that the General Assembly should continue to consider the issue at its current session, in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of section 1B (section III) of its resolution 52/220.

11. **Mr. Sareva** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia on sections 27 through 27G, said that efficiency and effectiveness had increased in a number of areas, resulting in aggregate savings of $4.2 million under part VIII. In other areas, however, further progress could be made.

12. The Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management should play the leading role in planning efficiency and cost-saving measures. His delegation wished to have more information on the objectives of the Oversight Support Unit established within the Office and on the ad hoc assignments it carried out (A/54/6/Rev.1, para. 27A.25). It has taken note of the recommendation of ACABQ regarding the posts in the Unit.

13. The European Union was deeply concerned at the number of cases pending before the Joint Appeals Board. Staff were entitled to timely resolution of appeals. Delays adversely affected staff morale, undermined the principle of cost-effectiveness and could jeopardize the proper application of the Staff Rules. The European Union therefore agreed with ACABQ that there was a need to examine the workload of all bodies dealing with the administration of justice to determine whether enough resources were allocated to that area.

14. With respect to section 27B, his delegation concurred with ACABQ that the Secretary-General should review the mode of financing of the posts in the Peacekeeping Financing Division, which were currently funded from the support account, and report on the matter in the context of the next budget estimates. It also agreed that the four posts required for core maintenance of IMIS should be approved as temporary posts rather than financed from general temporary assistance. He requested more detailed information regarding the role and functions of the Accounts Division, and asked whether further efficiencies could be identified in the Division.

15. The European Union had long supported human resources management reform. It remained concerned at the slow implementation of delegation of authority. While it was pleased to note that the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) had begun to develop a monitoring capacity, it agreed with the observation of ACABQ in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/52/7/Rev.1) that the monitoring of implementation of delegated authority should be streamlined. It also shared the Advisory Committee's concern at the lack of progress in streamlining personnel actions and processes, which were currently excessively cumbersome, time consuming and very costly. The simplification of procedures, reinforced by the use of modern technology, could resolve the bulk of that inefficiency.

16. He requested clarification regarding the high level of resources requested for travel under section 27C. The schedule of meetings of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee was one area where savings might be achieved. His delegation welcomed the high priority placed by the Secretary-General on training. However, it wished to have more information on the types of training that staff would be receiving, and it considered that there was a need for performance indicators to evaluate the impact of training.

17. Turning to section 27D, he said that the European Union supported IMIS and the conversion of the 29 IMIS positions, which were currently financed from general temporary assistance, to established posts. It was to be hoped that the system's transition from the developmental to the operational phase would lead to further cost savings. The European Union agreed with the recommendation of ACABQ that the cost and benefits of information technology should be clearly presented under each section of the budget, as appropriate. It also endorsed the Advisory Committee's request in paragraph VIII.44 of its report concerning the establishment of a single organizational unit for IMIS and information technology services. It looked forward to receiving more information about the outcome of the feasibility study on the upgrading of the optical disk system (ODS). It concurred with ACABQ that, with the application of ODS, Internet and Extranet technology, it should be possible to establish more efficient electronic document support in conference rooms.

18. The European Union had supported the common services project resulting from the proposals of the Secretary-General on reform (A/51/950). It considered that procurement, information technology, personnel services, security and safety, and, in particular, printing services, were good candidates for common delivery. Common services should be given system-wide priority. The General Assembly should take an active and positive approach, and Member States should request the cooperation of the organizations concerned with a view to breaking down the barriers that existed to closer cooperation. The Administrative Committee on Coordination might play a coordinating role.

19. With respect to section 27E, he said that the European Union agreed with ACABQ that there was no need to establish vacancy management units because IMIS would be able to track the vacancy situation in a timely fashion, and concurred with its views on the proposed abolition of nine posts and on the large increase in the provisions under contractual services. Regarding section 27F, he commended the arrangements made for the provision of common services by the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV), and asked whether the Secretariat would apply the lessons learned at other duty stations. He looked forward to the inclusion in the next proposed

programme budget of the results of the application of the new methodology for charging the United Nations Drug Control Programme for services provided by UNOV. The European Union concurred with the views of ACABQ regarding the post upgrades proposed under the section.

20. Referring to section 27G, he welcomed the commitment of the Secretary-General to increase gradually the regular budget component of UNON, with a view to easing the administrative costs levied on the substantive programmes of UNEP and Habitat. The European Union agreed with ACABQ that a mechanism should be established for determining the total costs of UNON and how they should be apportioned. Common delivery of services should be pursued. The European Union concurred with the observations of ACABQ in paragraphs VIII.116 to VIII.118 of its report regarding the charge-back procedure.

21. **Ms. Merchant** (Norway), speaking on sections 27 through 27G, said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. It welcomed the savings made under section 27 and its subsections and wished to encourage still greater efficiency and effectiveness. It attached great importance to the role of the Oversight Support Unit and supported the recommendation of ACABQ regarding the posts in the Unit. The number of cases pending before the Joint Appeals Board was a cause for concern, and her delegation agreed with ACABQ that there was a need to examine the workload of all bodies dealing with the administration of justice to determine whether enough resources were allocated to that area. It also concurred with the Advisory Committee that the practice of funding posts in the Peacekeeping Finance Division from the support account should be reviewed.

22. Her delegation welcomed the ongoing process of human resources management reform and the development of a capacity for monitoring the implementation of delegation of authority. It strongly supported the Secretary-General's view that staff training was an essential element in the modernization of the Organization. It considered that the organizations of the United Nations system could cooperate more closely with one another in the provision of support services, and that ACC could play a positive role in that respect.

23. Her delegation had long advocated the strengthening of UNON, the only United Nations office located in a developing country. The proposed resource growth of over 15 per cent under section 27G was in line with the recommendations of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements and would reduce the burden on the substantive programmes of UNEP and Habitat. Her delegation agreed with ACABQ that a methodology should be established for determining the costs of UNON and how they should be apportioned.

24. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 27A of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

25. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that her delegation wished to reiterate its support for the decision by the Bureau to consider the proposed programme budget section by section. With regard to section 27A, she would appreciate the Secretariat's assessment of the experience acquired since the establishment of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management in the context of the Secretary-General's reform package. She also wished to have more information on the nature of the interaction between the Oversight Support Unit and the three main oversight bodies. It was stated, in paragraph 27A.27 (d) (iii) of the proposed programme budget that the Unit prepared updated status reports on the measures taken to implement the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). She wondered why no reference was made in the paragraph to the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). Her delegation shared the concern of ACABQ at the build-up of backlog cases for the Joint Appeals Board. She would like to have updated information on the status of the cases pending before the Board and on the measures being taken by the Secretariat to enhance the administration of justice.

26. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) asked whether expected accomplishments would be included under section 27A in future budget proposals or whether some other means of tracking progress towards established goals would be found. Noting that $90,000 had been requested for travel, he requested information on expenditure on travel during the current biennium and on any savings achieved through more cost-effective travel arrangements. He would welcome clarification regarding the role of the Oversight Support Unit. He also wished to know what kind of

administrative support was provided to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

27. **Mr. Takahara** (Japan) said that his delegation welcomed the overall reduction of 0.9 per cent in the resource requirements for section 27 and its subsections, and took note of the net increase of 17 posts to be funded from the regular budget. With respect to section 27A, he said that the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management and the Management Policy Office had special responsibility for promoting efficient and effective management, streamlining administrative processes, improving programme delivery and ensuring an integrated approach throughout the Secretariat. He sought clarification regarding the work to be assigned to the consultants and experts referred to in paragraph 27A.18, since the Management Policy Office already appeared to have expertise in the areas enumerated in that paragraph. His delegation recognized the need to facilitate the work of the three main oversight bodies and follow up their recommendations. However, it considered that the proposed inward redeployment of one P-5 post to the Oversight Support Unit had not been adequately explained. The Secretariat must be able to point to a considerably increased workload or identified weaknesses and anticipated inconveniences. With respect to paragraph 27A.31, he asked whether the additional resource requirement relating to investment management software licences was likely to be recurrent.

28. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) asked how the functions of the immediate office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management described in paragraph 27A.5 differed from those of the Executive Office of the Department of Management referred to in paragraph 27A.43. He requested information on the distribution of posts among the various appeal bodies.

29. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the Secretariat would provide information on the workload statistics of the administration of justice bodies for the past three years in informal consultations. It was difficult to provide a breakdown of the work assigned to the individual posts shown in table 27A.11 because the unit was a very small one, and it was impossible to identify a single post with a single function.

30. The purpose of the Oversight Support Unit was not to provide services for the oversight bodies but to ensure that their recommendations were implemented throughout the Secretariat. The recommendations of JIU, once approved, were tracked in exactly the same way as those of the other oversight bodies. Much internal coordination was required in order to ensure that such recommendations resulted in changes in Secretariat working methods: that was the Unit's function. Some administrative support services were provided to the Rwanda Tribunal, using extrabudgetary support funds.

31. The additional resources of $59,500 relating to investment management software licences was a recurrent expenditure since most such licences ran for about a year. The amount might seem high but the Organization's cash management had been greatly improved by using the software during the current biennium. During the next biennium bank interest earned was expected to grow from $900,000 to about $3 million.

32. The immediate office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management was a very small unit providing services to ensure an even flow of the Department's substantive work. Its function was very different from that of the Department's Executive Office. Each Secretariat department usually had an executive office providing human resources management and financial management services.

33. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that the various functions of the administration of justice unit might involve a conflict of interest between, for example, the provision of advice to the Secretary-General about staff grievances and the servicing of the administration of justice bodies themselves.

34. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that he would provide full details on the question in informal consultations, but it was precisely to avoid such conflicts of interest that the unit was not located in the Office of Human Resources Management.

35. **The Chairman** said that she took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 27A of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration.

36. *It was so decided.*

37. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 27B of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

38. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that his delegation would like to know the purpose of the provision of $20,900 referred to in paragraph 27B.11 and the equivalent level of spending under the current biennium. It would also like to know what the "significant workload indicators" listed in paragraph 27B.17 were used for.

39. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller), referring to the source of funds for the Peacekeeping Financing Division, said that in the context of the 1996-1997 budget proposals the Secretariat had proposed shifting some posts in the Division and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations from the support account to the regular budget. That proposal had not been approved by the General Assembly, and the Secretariat had been reluctant to revisit the issue in the context of the current and next programme budgets. However, if there was significant support in the Committee it would consider doing so in the proposals for the biennium 2002-2003.

40. The Secretariat was of course always seeking greater efficiency: for example, under the last two budgets it had achieved a reduction of half a dozen or so posts in the Accounts Division. The Division's work was basically to keep the Organization's books. He would provide full details of its activities in writing in informal consultations.

41. There was always a provision for outside ad hoc expertise, which might be needed on a contingency basis, for example in cases of fraud or forged signatures. None of the funds allocated for the current biennium had yet been used. The workload indicators were designed simply to measure increases or decreases in the volume of work done.

42. **The Chairman** said that she took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 27B of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration.

43. *It was so decided.*

44. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 27C of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

45. **Mr. Orr** (Canada), referring to section 27C, noted that the Advisory Committee remained of the view that, in spite of the many past stated goals of streamlining administrative and personnel action processes and procedures in human resources management, little progress appeared to have been achieved so far (A/54/7, para. VIII.32). The rationale for investing in information technology was to make an organization more efficient, but sometimes such investment merely automated existing processes. For example, the Office of Human Resources Management was planning to automate over 100 personnel forms. His delegation agreed strongly with the Advisory Committee that the Secretariat should first review and simplify its procedures, thus reducing the number of forms to be automated. The lesson learned from the implementation of IMIS was that the automation of a cumbersome system resulted in a modern but still cumbersome system. His delegation sought assurances from the Office that its procedures would be reviewed.

46. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that her delegation welcomed the note by the Secretary-General containing a reformulated narrative of section 27C (A/C.5/54/17) issued in response to a request by CPC for the programme narrative to be harmonized with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 53/221, especially with respect to the delegation of authority. However, the revised narrative did not reflect the concerns expressed by delegations in CPC and would have to be considered in detail in informal consultations.

47. Paragraph 27C.34 referred to certain activities connected with the Working Group on Personnel Services. The initiative was commendable, but there was no reference to the legislative mandate for it. Furthermore, resolution 53/221 did not give the Secretariat a free hand to implement the Secretary-General's proposals on the reform of human resources management before establishing an accountable and sound system for the delegation of authority. The establishment of such a system did not receive much attention in the programme narrative.

48. Her delegation welcomed the proposed increased resources for staff training and development but endorsed the comments of the Advisory Committee concerning the constant uptrend in resources required for such activities and the lack of clear presentation of the real needs or of the use of the resources.

49. **Mr. Fedorov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation had already drawn attention to the considerable growth of resources for staff training and development. Training programmes should be designed to equip the staff with knowledge and skills directly connected with the performance of their duties. Pursuant to Article 101 of the Charter the Secretary-General should recruit only highly qualified persons; Member States would not want to spend resources for training any other kind of person. It was not acceptable that resources should be spent on general training and development. The United Nations was not a training centre but a very important political Organization required to carry out very difficult tasks.

50. **Mr. Nee** (United States of America) said that his delegation supported the Secretary-General's programme for reform of human resources management — a complicated undertaking which could not be accomplished overnight. Staff training and development was the essential ingredient for the necessary change in organizational culture, and increased training needs were the main element underlying the increase requested for the Office of Human Resources Management.

51. The description of the training and staff development programmes, although verbose, did not give a sense of how the funds were to be spent; his delegation needed more quantitative details in order to judge whether a programme was reasonable and measure the achievement of the goals. In short, it required more justification for the increased request. It would like to know in particular whether advantage was taken of the facilities offered by the ILO training centre in Italy.

52. In paragraph 27C.13, $267,800 was requested for travel of management and staff participants to the Staff-Management Coordination Committee; $95,000 of that amount represented resource growth attributable to the decision of that Committee to meet twice a year. Such a programme expansion and its budgetary implications had not been endorsed by CPC or the Fifth Committee and should be deleted. With regard to paragraph 27C.16, his delegation did not believe that hospitality or representation funds should be used by the staff to entertain each other and it would welcome an explanation of the representation funds requested for use in connection with the Staff-Management Coordination Committee. Perhaps the salary surveys referred to in paragraph 27C.36(c) should more properly be carried out by the International Civil Service Commission. With regard to the purchase of a biochemistry analyser at a cost of $180,000 (para. 27C.55), he asked whether it would not be more cost-effective to use the services of a private laboratory. Lastly, his delegation would welcome an explanation of why the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General needed a provision of $42,800, at maintenance level, to cover external printing of forms and stationery (para. 27C.14); a requirement of such magnitude for stationery was unique.

53. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) said that his delegation generally endorsed the comments of the Advisory Committee on section 27C. The delegation of authority was of critical importance for the Office of Human Resources Management, and his delegation took note of the Secretariat's assurance that no delegation of the Office's responsibilities would proceed until clear guidelines were in place and its staff had received the necessary training. The observation made by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VIII.42 of document A/52/7/Rev.1 remained valid and should be complied with.

54. With regard to the 30 per cent increase in the staff training and development budget, while everyone would agree that the Organization depended on the quality of its staff and while his delegation fully supported the priority given to training, it must be remembered that training was not completed when merely implemented: it was a continuing feedback loop. Its results must be measured against objectives, and the conclusions then fed back to the planning stage of the next round. The number of participants in a training programme was only a minor performance indicator, and more of a qualitative evaluation was required.

55. Furthermore, training itself was not a goal but rather an integral part of a strategic plan for human resources development. The Office should draw up such a plan. The recommendation made by the Advisory Committee in its previous report on the comprehensive evaluation of all training programmes should be acted upon without delay and the findings made available.

56. His delegation appreciated the Office's efforts to rectify the geographical imbalance in the Secretariat. The usefulness of the national competitive examination programme had been reaffirmed repeatedly by the

General Assembly. The projection of the Operational Services Division (para. 27C.23(c)) that 200 successful candidates would be placed annually during the biennium was certainly an ambitious one. As a seriously under-represented country, Japan had of course no objection to setting such a goal but would welcome comparable data for the current or previous biennium. It would also like to know the Office's thinking about means of streamlining competitive entry processes (para. 27C.31) and the justification for the requested increase in general and temporary assistance (para. 27C.25) as an alternative to establishing permanent posts; it requested more information about the career resource centres referred to in paragraph 27C.59 (d).

57. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that only minimal changes had been proposed in the programme narrative for section 27C as a result of the adoption of resolution 53/221. He was aware that the implications of the resolution were of considerable concern to delegations; a representative of OHRM would provide greater detail in informal consultations.

58. The training provided was highly varied: there had always been language training in the Organization but in recent years the emphasis had increasingly shifted in favour of management development and information technology to enable the Secretariat to make full use of new technology. Although some funding for training was centrally administered, for example, for management training, separate allocations were made by OHRM to the various departments for substantive skills development. Reflecting the Secretary-General's concern that there should be greater emphasis on training within the Organization, an expansion of training funds in an amount of $1 million had been requested — an increase of 10 per cent.

59. In terms of the size of its payroll, the Organization had historically placed rather light emphasis on training. The Advisory Committee had recommended that an external evaluation of training within the Organization should be carried out and a report had been submitted to ACABQ and could be made available as background information.

60. The Staff-Management Coordination Committee, a forum which allowed management and staff from different duty stations to meet had been in place for 10 years or more and had proved its worth as a means of enabling managers to become aware of the staff viewpoint, thus avoiding unnecessary conflict and ensuring a harmonious working environment. It had been decided that it would be useful to increase the frequency of the meetings from once to twice a year, and a request for increased travel funds had accordingly been made.

61. The request for an amount for hospitality contained in paragraph 27C.16 was related to a number of events, including meetings of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee. With reference to the need for a hospitality allowance, it was necessary, in the course of negotiations between staff and management, to be able to relax the atmosphere a little as the negotiations were sometimes difficult. Like the Fifth Committee, the Staff-Management Coordination Committee frequently continued to work long after normal working hours.

62. A request had been made for general temporary assistance rather than new posts. In connection with ongoing maintenance operations for the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) as it was not yet possible to be certain how many established posts IMIS would ultimately require; it had therefore been thought preferable to request funds in a flexible manner. The long-term requirement for maintenance of the human resources aspect of IMIS would, however, require established posts.

63. Regarding the purchase of a biochemistry analyser for the Medical Service (A/54/6/Rev.1 (vol. III, para. 27C.55)), it had been determined that the cost of individual tests could be avoided by the purchase of the equipment, which would, in the long run, result in a cost-benefit advantage.

64. A question had been asked concerning the sum of $42,800 stated in paragraph 27C.14 to be for the external printing of forms and stationery used by the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General. In fact, the provision was related to items used by OHRM as a whole and was not confined to the small number of staff who actually worked in that Office.

65. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 27D of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

66. **Ms. Incera** (Costa Rica) began by reminding the Secretariat of the request she had made the previous

month for a copy of the contract of the catering firm, which she had still not received.

67. Her delegation recognized that it was essential for the Organization to have good security but was concerned at the high cost of the arrangements made. In particular, she asked on what basis resources were being requested for security dogs. She had asked for that information previously but had not received any satisfactory response. She wondered whether the resources assigned for that purpose really corresponded to the needs of Member States and asked why the resources were not used to pay for additional security guards.

68. It appeared that, early in October, there had been a meeting between officials of the United Nations and representatives of the New York Police Department. She asked the Secretariat for an explanation of the linkage between the United Nations and the police in New York City.

69. It was well known that gifts were frequently presented to the Secretary-General which clearly belonged to the United Nations and not to him personally. She asked to be provided with a list of such gifts together with details of where they were kept and what their value was.

70. Referring to articles that had appeared in the press concerning the condition of the United Nations Headquarters building, she said that her delegation was concerned at the possible danger from asbestos particles in the air that might be spread throughout the building in the heating and air-conditioning system. In particular, she asked whether the quality of the air was regularly checked and whether tests were made to determine whether asbestos particles were a health factor within the building.

71. On a related subject, she said that notices had been posted in the Delegates' Lounge prohibiting smoking and asked on whose authority they had been displayed since they appeared not to have been properly authorized.

72. **Mr. Nee** (United States of America) referred to a finding by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/54/393, para. 96) that the Administration had been overcharging users for long-distance telephone calls and that, over time, a related surplus of approximately $8.5 million had accrued. That constituted an unbudgeted surplus, and its use to purchase telephone and related equipment and services was an unauthorized use of surplus funds. According to the OIOS report, management had informed the Office that steps had been taken to address its recommendations in that regard. He asked what steps had been taken, what the status of the $8.5 million surplus was and how it was reflected in the accounts.

73. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) asked the Secretariat to provide information concerning the United Nations Common Services Task Force, in particular its composition, its functions, the results obtained, and how its work was related to the Office of Central Support Services.

74. With reference to paragraph 27D.6, she asked the Secretariat to provide further details of the reductions in resource requirements and of the cost-saving measures and the savings in operational costs they had yielded.

75. The Secretariat had stated at various times that more rigorous security and safety arrangements were necessary for the Organization but it appeared that the resources set aside for that purpose and the number of posts remained substantially the same. She therefore asked what operational changes were planned in security and safety arrangements and how the arrangements related to the needs of Member States. On the subject of training in the area of security, she asked what unit was responsible for providing training and what criteria had been used to select it. Referring to the closed circuit television security system, she asked what criteria had been used for the location of security cameras and what measures were taken to protect the confidentiality of information in areas where such cameras were placed.

76. On the subject of dogs used for security purposes, she asked the Secretariat to provide information in writing on whether the dogs were provided by a contractor or had been purchased, on the comparative costs involved, on the bidding process and on the terms of the contract. She also wanted to know whether the security staff of the United Nations were capable of defusing any explosive devices that might be detected by the dogs.

77. Her delegation also wished the Secretariat to provide information on the United Nations optical disk system, particularly concerning its effectiveness, its practical usefulness and the level of utilization by Member States.

78. Her delegation noted the increase in resources requested for the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) because of the need to hire temporary staff. She asked whether the upward trend would continue, and enquired about interconnectivity between peacekeeping operations, the tribunals, and IMIS.

79. In relation to the cafeteria and restaurants, she asked for details of the contract and wanted to know, why, following the refurbishment of the cafeteria, prices had increased without any apparent corresponding improvement in the quality of the food or the service provided.

80. In conclusion, she supported the representative of Costa Rica concerning the need to ensure that any refurbishment of the Secretariat building took into account health requirements, in particular to safeguard the staff and the representatives of Member States working in the building.

81. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) noted with concern the observation by ACABQ (A/54/7, para. VIII.43) that the IMIS budget estimates were not transparent enough. The contribution of IMIS to the efficient management of the Organization and the expected cost savings should be presented in parallel with resource and post requirements. It would also be useful if the budget estimates included a breakdown of recurrent and non-recurrent costs. For a Secretariat-wide programme such as IMIS, Member States should be given a clear overall picture that included programme and budgetary implications and a multi-year phased timetable.

82. His delegation wished to know whether there were guidelines for the provision and replacement of information equipment throughout the Secretariat. In conclusion, he said that the General Service staffing levels should be reviewed in the light of the measures taken to reduce workloads, such as the introduction of electronic office equipment.

83. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) recalled that, when IMIS had first been proposed, various statements had been made on the increased efficiency and the reduction in support costs that it would make possible. It had been anticipated that IMIS would radically alter the way in which the Organization managed its administrative tasks, in particular by reducing duplication, and that it would yield substantial savings. In spite of the expectation of substantial savings the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 envisaged an increase in costs for maintenance.

84. At the same time, he felt that there must have been some reduction in costs related to the phasing out of the old computer system and to the reduction in overlapping and duplicated tasks. When IMIS had first been proposed it had been stated that there were 22 computer systems which were not part of an integrated management system and necessitated considerable rekeying of data. He therefore requested information on the savings that had already been achieved through IMIS and on future savings that were expected in the next biennium and thereafter.

85. In that connection he noted that the section of the ACABQ report (A/54/7) concerning information technology included a table showing expenditure on information technology maintenance. He asked what proportion related to IMIS.

86. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the table in question included a column relating to ISCC and IMIS. Maintenance of IMIS came under section 27, within which the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, the Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of Central Support Services all had a share in terms of IMIS. No more detailed breakdown of maintenance costs was available.

87. In response to the question as to the expected savings from IMIS, he pointed out that the system would not be fully installed until the end of 2000. It would therefore be some time before the shakedown period was completed and cost savings were apparent.

88. Guidelines on the replacement of information technology equipment would be made available in informal consultations. In essence, the system provided for the replacement of personal computers on a standardized basis.

89. The recent adjustment to prices in the cafeteria was unrelated to the refurbishing of the facility. It was one of the several price adjustments provided for in the contract which the Organization had signed with the service provider.

90. With reference to the anti-explosive detection services, it had been found to be less expensive to lease the services of an explosive-sniffing dog and its handler than to purchase the dog and employ its handler. Information on the cost of the dog, the value of the contract and other related issues had been provided to the Advisory Committee. On the issue of

security in general, the Advisory Committee had requested the preparation and submission to it by the spring of 2000 of a comprehensive expert survey of security needs of United Nations facilities and the capacity of the Organization to address them, together with an indication of the related resource requirements.

91. As for the health concerns which had been raised, in order to ensure the safety of staff, regular tests were conducted of air and water quality as well as of the level of electromagnetic interference in the Secretariat buildings.

92. On the issue of overcharging for long-distance telephone service from Headquarters, it must be acknowledged that the current system was based on antiquated software which resulted in charges that were high relative to the cost of the long-distance services provided by outside vendors. Steps were being taken to remedy the situation, although it must be borne in mind that certain indirect costs also had to be met.

93. Lastly, with regard to the cafeteria contract, the opinion of the Office of Legal Affairs was being sought on the appropriateness of publishing contracts with vendors.

94. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that the proposed programme budget had not identified the costs related to the development and maintenance of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) at the regional commissions. It would be helpful if the Secretariat could provide that information.

95. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 27E of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

96. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) welcomed the proposed reduction in resources under section 27E, which had been made possible through increased automation and the streamlining of procedures. His delegation hoped that similar reductions could be achieved at other duty stations. On the question of staff development and post requirements, his Government could not support the request for additional resources. It was difficult, for example, to justify the hiring of 15 full-time language teachers at Geneva, when there were comparatively few such teachers at other duty stations. In that connection, it would be useful to know whether an integrated policy on language training existed.

97. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) welcomed the absence of any proposals for increases under section 27E of the proposed programme budget. His delegation believed, however, that there was still scope for further reform and greater efficiency and would pursue the matter in informal consultations.

98. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 27F of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

99. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) noted that Vienna was more advanced in the provision of joint and/or common services than either New York or Geneva, including the capacity to develop workload performance indicators for determining billing rates for common or joint services. The lessons learned from Vienna should be applied to other duty stations.

100. His delegation was of the view that the proposed consultancy services in connection with a bidding exercise for the group medical insurance plan administered by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) were unnecessary.

Section 26. Public information (continued)

101. **Mr. Chandra** (India) said that his delegation endorsed the views of the Advisory Committee and of CPC on section 26 of the proposed programme budget. The year 2001 had been designated as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and, in a world that was increasingly interdependent, any expenditure on the promotion of mutual understanding, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and international cooperation was well justified.

102. **Mr. Fox** (Australia) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statements made previously by the representatives of the European Union, Japan, the United States, Israel and Canada. The Organization's public information function should promote its priority activities and it was therefore odd that more resources had been proposed for section 26 than for any of the eight priority areas identified in the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. The Secretariat should provide a breakdown of how public information resources had been distributed among those priority areas. The fact that the increase requested was modest was precisely why his delegation had difficulty in supporting the request. It should surely be possible to meet the proposed increase through more efficient management and leadership.

103. On the question of the relationship between public information and information technology, his delegation noted the Advisory Committee's continuing concerns about the exploitation of electronic publications and about the precise mix of in-house and external printing. One of the most significant recent developments, which had done more than anything else to make the activities of the United Nations more accessible and transparent, had been the establishment without additional resources of the United Nations web site. His delegation remained concerned, however, at the apparent lack of coordination in the establishment and maintenance of other web sites within the United Nations system.

104. The Advisory Committee had noted that the extent to which the United Nations was investing in new technology could not be precisely determined since not enough information was contained in the proposed programme budget. Efficiencies and savings that resulted from the introduction of information technology should be clearly identified in the budget proposals. The Secretariat should also expedite the development of the comprehensive long-term information strategy called for by the Advisory Committee.

105. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) expressed his delegation's support for the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and stressed the importance of the role played by information management in promoting global awareness of United Nations activities and the need to incorporate it fully into the medium-term plan. He emphasized, firstly, the need for equal emphasis to be placed on the various broadcasting and publishing media used by the United Nations, due attention being accorded to the conventional media. In that connection he proposed that the conventional media should be financed from the regular budget so as to reach a broader public in the developing countries. Secondly, he emphasized the need for equal prominence of web sites in the six official languages and urged that provision should be made for a post for coordination of the Arabic-language web site financed from the regular budget. In that connection, he expressed his delegation's concern regarding the use of general temporary assistance funds and the borrowing of short-term temporary staff to perform the task of coordinating the Arabic-language web site. His delegation attached particular importance to equivalence between the six official languages.

106. **Mr. Salamat** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and shared the views expressed by the representative of India in support of the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The issue was particularly important at the approach of the new millennium. His delegation therefore welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information (DPI) to strengthen its capacity to draw international attention to the dialogue among civilizations and to the proposed establishment of a web site devoted to the subject.

107. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said, with reference to the presentation of section 26 of the proposed programme budget, that the Department of Public Information had a geographical spread unlike that of any other department and its programme structure was not always congruent with that spread. Given the cross-cutting nature of its programming, it was inevitable that some programmes would be implemented by more than one unit of the Organization, a reality which ideally should be reflected in the presentation of the programme budget proposals. Any change to the programme structure of the section, however, would require changes to be made in the structure of the medium-term plan.

108. In the area of technological innovations, the main developments had been the establishment of the United Nations web site and the growing use of the Internet and of digital technology in photography and television production. The investment in digital technology was essential to ensure that programmes produced in-house were compatible with the formats and equipment used by external media disseminators. The development of on-line services would continue to involve all six official languages.

109. Concerning the staffing of the new on-line services, the Department had recourse to temporary and short-term assistance in order to retain maximum flexibility in responding to the rapid changes that were a characteristic of the sector. Over the long term, however, it hoped to formalize the staffing situation in that area.

110. With regard to the proposed pilot project for the establishment of the international broadcasting system, even though the programme budget proposals included seed capital for the project, the latter would not move forward unless the additional resources required could be raised from extrabudgetary sources.

111. Concerning the omission of the Conference on Restrictive Business Practices from the list of international meetings and conferences to be organized under the auspices of the United Nations in the biennium 2000-2001, such omissions sometimes occurred because of the way in which the mandates for the conferences were processed. DPI, however, would be providing support services for the Conference in question.

112. The increase in the amount budgeted for the travel expenses of the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General had been proposed as a result of previous overspending under that heading, including during the current biennium. It would therefore be prudent to ensure that adequate resources were provided for the Office in the biennium 2000-2001.

113. Some members had questioned the usefulness of having each year two separate issuances of the compilation of General Assembly resolutions. The first issuance took the form of a press release which became available shortly after the General Assembly completed the main part of its session. Many delegations found that early issuance to be extremely useful. The other issuance was the official record of the General Assembly and became available at a much later stage after the material had been edited and translated.

114. On the subject of media participation in the Main Committees of the General Assembly, journalists who were accredited to the Organization were free to cover and report on all open meetings of the United Nations. They did not have access, however, to closed meetings.

115. The proposed reduction in resources for information activities related to the question of Palestine was a purely technical adjustment and did not reflect any change in the Organization's priorities.

116. As for suggestions that the functions of DPI might overlap with those of other departments, such as the Office of External Relations in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, every effort was being made to enhance coordination with a view to avoiding duplication and overlap.

117. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that, in considering the activities which had been proposed in the field of public information, account should be taken of the technological gap that existed between Member States. Emphasis should not be placed solely on electronic bulletins, to which many Member States had only limited access. Many delegations depended on press releases and other documents in traditional print form. Member States should be more aware of the problems faced by some delegations.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.